

# The Atonement - What does it mean?

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[ 0 : 00 ] of Scripture, if you will, the first of which is to be found in Paul's letter to the Galatians, and I'm reading there from verse 11. This is what Paul says about his own biography of coming to the faith. I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the tradition of my fathers. But when he would set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. But I went away into Arabia, and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, that's Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none other of the other apostles, except James the Lord's brother. In what I am writing to you before God, I do not lie.

Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea. They only heard it said, he who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy, and they glorified God because of me. Then in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, reading from verse 1 to 11.

Now I would remind you, brothers, in what terms I preach to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast, unless you have believed in vain. For I deliver to you, as of the first importance, what I also received.

that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised in the third day, in accordance with the scriptures. Then he appeared to Cephas, that's Peter, then to the twelve.

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

[ 3 : 26 ] Lost of all as to one untimely bond, he appeared also to me, for I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

By the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preached, and so you believed. Amen, may the Lord bless those that redeeming may be to his praise and to his glory.

The last series on the atonement, looking at the teaching of Paul, I'd like to thank those who have assisted me thus far. That includes Ian, who's helped with the music, Barry and Stuart, who've helped in the services, Gerald, who's given the intimations, and you.

You've come, and I thank you for that. So we're turned away from the Old Testament, and we're turned away from the teaching of Jesus to the teaching of Paul on this subject.

[ 4 : 54 ] And as we look at the teaching of Paul, he has actually two things that he claims he's received personally from God.

The first is, is this. I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.

And the second matter is linked to it. Because it's what he says in 1 Corinthians 11, as we'll hear shortly, about the Lord's Supper.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body.

It is broken for you. So in writing to this church at Corinth, in which there were so many problems, he's pursuing before them teaching, which he believes that he's received directly from God.

[ 6 : 06 ] Now what's his authority for saying this? Now I would remind you, brothers, this is the person that we read, in what terms I preached to you the gospel which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast, unless you believed in vain.

For I deliver to you of the first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures.

So these two things that he's putting before the Corinthians, and which he claims that he's received, are linked. The teaching of what has happened in the death of Jesus, and the teaching of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, by which we recall what God has accomplished in the death of Jesus.

He says that these things have happened in accordance with the Scriptures. And he uses that twice, not only for the death of Jesus, but his resurrection.

So where does he get his understanding of the Scripture from? And we should believe that he held the Scriptures by which he means the Old Testament with a great high value.

[ 7 : 41 ] So he writes in his last letter, all Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

And let us be clear that if the Scripture was not inspired, if it was just a record of human thought, it would have achieved nothing.

But it's very interesting when he says all Scripture is inspired. He uses a very unusual Greek word, which in the entire Greek language only occurs there.

And it's Theonoustos that literally means God-breathed. Now let's think about that. This God-breathed Scripture.

And he goes from there and he starts to talk in Galatians about the origin of his gospel. I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel.

[ 8 : 56 ] I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it. But it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Now, the necessity of this revelation was not because the apostle did not know the Scripture. Listen to what he says in Galatians 1 verses 13 and 14.

You've heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people.

So extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. In his speech when he's defending his situation before the high priest in Acts 22, he says, I am a Jew born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day.

So if the apostle is so well versed in the law and the religion of his fathers, how is it he's unaware of the predictions that are in the Old Testament about the sufferings and glories of the Messiah?

[ 10 : 35 ] it's a question. And there is a portion of scripture which helps us to understand it. So Christ is going to show you this now from Matthew 15.

Now listen to this. then the Pharisees and the scribes came to Jesus from tradition, from Jerusalem and said, why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?

For they do not wash their hands when they eat. Jesus answered them, why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded honor your father and your mother and he who speaks evil of father and mother let him surely die.

But you say, if anyone tells his father or his mother what you would have gained from me is given to God, he need not honor his father, so for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.

And what is interesting about that quotation is that for the Pharisees what's more important is not the written letter.

[ 11 : 51 ] What's more important is the tradition of the elders. And Paul in that quotation I gave you from Galatians 1, he says, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

so the religion of Judaism takes its basis not on the written law of Genesis, Exodus, and so on, but rather on what prominent rabbis have said about it and how the tradition thinks it should be

interpreted.

And because that is the case, he's not aware of what the predictions are. Paul can tell you all about what rabbi this and that and the other said about different parts of the Old Testament.

But as far as the predictions are concerned, he's ignorant. Now, one thing we have to understand is that in the Judaism of the time of our Lord and now, there is no tradition about a suffering Messiah. Instead, what there is, is the concept of a conquering Messiah who would return at the end of the age. And John chapter 6 verse 15 refers to it.

[13:27] Perceiving that they, that is the crowds, were about to come and take Jesus by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

So this is the faith that the apostle has been reared in. A faith that expects the Messiah suddenly to come and depose the Romans as the tyrants they have become.

The idea of a suffering Messiah who would atone for the sins of his people, that's hidden from him. And so it is the case that this has to be revealed to him.

I deliver to you as a first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

Is this unique to the apostle Paul? No, it's not. There are many people in today's world who are in darkness as to why Jesus came at all.

[14:46] And what requires to happen is for them to receive a revelation. And that revelation centers in the cross and in God's love for such people.

discovery. When he who set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace was pleased to reveal his son to me in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles.

So this is a discovery. It's a discovery that has not come about by his own initiative, but by the direct intervention of God upon his life.

he has already said it. I did not receive it from man. Nobody taught me this. It came through a blaze of glory, a revelation of Jesus Christ.

So the whole of his teaching, as far as we're concerned tonight, has got nothing to do with his former education in Judaism, but it has got to do with a revelation of Jesus Christ.

[16:06] So when did this revelation take place? On the road to Damascus, when Paul was about to be going to the synagogues in Damascus and arresting people for their faith.

faith. And so what we find that in his later years he refers to this event, in particular before his defense, before the high priest, this revelation.

revelation. Now what's the effect of this revelation? Immediately following in Acts 9 we read this, For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus, and in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus saying, He is the Son of God.

Saul increased all the more in strength and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus, proving that Jesus was the Christ. so in his early ministry he's concentrating on the truths of the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus is the eternal Son, and on his resurrection from the dead.

But his appreciation of what this atonement meant was yet to develop. At a later stage he went to the synagogue in Thessalonica and we were told this, And Paul went in as was his custom, and for three Sabbaths he argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead saying, This Jesus that I proclaim to you is the Christ.

[18:03] Now when you compare these two things, this initial stress on the divinity of the Son of God, and then when we look at Acts 17 and he's now talking about the death of Jesus, something had happened in his mind.

He refers in Galatians to the fact that this has been made to him by revelation. And he says there, But when he who set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and again I returned to Damascus.

Now we're not told what happened when he went to Arabia, but the probability is that there he sought the Lord about the content of this newfound faith.

It is a matter of speculation since this is the only reference he makes to that event. What he does say is that after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter and remained with him fifteen days.

Of the other apostles I saw none except James, the Lord's brother. So what's happening here is that the apostles all got all this revelation in his heart and in his mind, but he wants to hear from an eyewitness what it was really all about, and so he discusses it with Peter.

[ 19 : 51 ] Three years this happened after his conversion, but then a time gap of fourteen years, and we read that after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas taking Titus along with him.

I went up by revelation and I laid before them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain.

So this is a challenge. Is what he's saying the right thing? So he goes up and meets these apostles, James, Peter, and John, and he puts before them what he's been teaching, and they say this, or he records this, but on the contrary when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James, and Peter, and John gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

So here is a tremendous meeting. What they are saying when they give him the right hand of fellowship and they shake his hand is your revelation is from God.

It's based and it's in line with the scriptures as we understand them. Peter could say that. So we come thirdly and lastly to the message.

[ 21 : 33 ] I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

scriptures. When you take this phrase, Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, you can regard that as being a summary, a summary statement of all his teaching and what is contained in his public speeches.

Going back to his visit to Thessalonica, we read that Paul went in as was his custom. And for three Sabbaths, he debated with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead.

So there's another summary. So where do we find his teaching about the death of Jesus? We find it in quite a number of the epistles or letters that he wrote to the various churches which he had been instrumental of founding under God.

Not in any one epistle, but in a great number. And that teaching about the death of Jesus is summed up under three distinct words.

[ 23 : 04 ] Reconciliation, Redemption, and Propitiation. Now the first word is this, reconciliation.

You find it in 2 Corinthians 5, 18-19. All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

What does that statement mean? Now this stuff that's underneath it which looks like a foreign language is in fact the alliteration of what the Greek says. The noun in question is a noun called katalagi.

kroni. Now it's interesting to know that in the time of classical Greek, 300 BC, this was a word that you would use, and the verb you would use it, to go to the bank.

[ 24 : 17 ] Because what you would have done, you would have gone to the Greek national bank, and you'd have taken all your ten pence pieces there, and you'd have given them to the teller, and he would have given you back pound coins to bring it up to date.

And that is covered by this verb, because then what it meant was changing your coinage from one denomination into another. And that meaning is at the back of this.

But by the time of the New Testament, it's got nothing to do with banking. What it's got to do with is this. It means to take a dyed-in-the-wool enemy and make him your dearest friend.

In the cross, that is what God has done. We were enemies of God, opposed to the gospel.

In the cross, we become his best friends. Isn't that wonderful? The second word is the word redemption.

[ 25 : 35 ] We find it in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 7 and 8. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of his trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us.

Now the term that's used is the Greek word *apolutrosis*, which means a liberation, a setting free, a deliverance, a release.

And Jesus himself spoke of this meaning. In John 8, 36, he said, if the Son shall make you free, you will be free indeed.

That's what redemption means, a setting free. Charles Wesley, in the hymn *Oh for a thousand tongues to sing*, speaks of it in the second verse.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free, his blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me.

[ 27 : 00 ] Bostle writes to the Romans, he says, we know that our own self was crucified with him so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin.

But if we have died with Christ, we believe we shall also live with him. How many people who have been in this world, who in the secrecy of their own heart in their bedroom or wherever, have cried out, oh God, if only I was free of this, this being some affliction in which they are bound.

And some of them have found that freedom in God. He breaks the power of cancelled sin, he sets the prisoner free, sin.

There's a final word, propitiation. This word only occurs once in Paul and twice in the epistle of John. In Paul, we read it in Romans 3 25, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins.

[ 28 : 32 ] Now, it's a truism to say that modern translations don't really know what to do about this. Indeed, the New International Version defines it as the atoning sacrifice, but if you look, there's a footnote that says or the one who satisfies or takes away the wrath of God.

And that's what this word means, the satisfaction of the wrath of God. It may only occur three times in the New Testament, but it is in fact a very important word.

this satisfaction or appeasement of the wrath of God is why the apostle can write in Romans 8 and 1, there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Listen to what he says to the Ephesians. Among these, we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so were by nature the children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

But God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ. It has dealt with the wrath of God when Jesus died in your place and mine.

[ 30 : 12 ] God will come to God. How does he react to the majesty of all this? Far be it from me to glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

That's a song of praise. We're going to sing about it in a minute. that's what Paul teaches relative to the death of Jesus.

We've looked at the Old Testament. We look there at the Day of Atonement. We looked at the teaching of Jesus, and now we've looked at the teaching of the Apostle.

In closing, let me suggest to you that this is a challenge challenge in three distinct ways. The first challenge, it's a challenge to our worship.

Here is the heartthrob, the heartbeat of the early church. It needs to be our heartbeat as well. It's a challenge to the way that we live our Christian life.

[ 31 : 35 ] God has done all of this. What are we going to do for him? And it's a challenge to our evangelism.

If this is the message that can so effectively alter human beings, we need to spread it abroad and make it other people's heartbeat as well.

Amen. May the Lord bless us. These considerations, may they be to his praise and to his glory. As we come into